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**U.S.-PHILIPPINE SECURITY RELATIONS: ITS  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM**

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This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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## ABSTRACT

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The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks upon America's symbols of economic and military dominance were a challenge to America's present-day greatness, and a test for the Western values of life, liberty and democracy. The US declaration of the global war on terrorism (GWOT), as an aftermath, was not a 'call to arms' for the Americans alone. It was a call for unity and action for all the freedom-loving nations of the world against this modern-day scourge. American and Philippine security interests dovetail in this respect. The terrorist threat, which has known international, regional and local linkages, has long besieged the U.S. and the Philippines. It is, therefore, in the mutual interest of both countries to explore the challenges and opportunities of their long-standing security cooperation in addressing the terrorist problem.



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## U.S.-PHILIPPINE SECURITY RELATIONS: ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM

We are also guided by the conviction that no nation can build a safer, better world alone. Alliances and multilateral institutions can multiply the strength of freedom-loving nations.<sup>1</sup>

—U.S. President George W. Bush  
17 September 2002

### **INTRODUCTION**

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. were a humbling and painful experience for the United States of America. The attacks in America's heartland came at the time when the U.S. is unquestionably the sole and most powerful nation in the world. The attack victims were of no particular race, creed, religion or status in life. Citizens from more than 90 countries died that day – innocent men, women and children from across the globe,<sup>2</sup> which reportedly include fifteen Filipinos.<sup>3</sup>

The U.S. responded with the so-called global war on terrorism (GWOT) to confront the growing global terrorist menace. It calls for its allies to address and isolate the terrorist threat in their respective country and region. The Philippines is one of the U.S. allies to whom such an appeal was directed. The U.S. and the Philippines have standing security arrangements that will serve as a basis for future engagements. Moreover, the Philippines has been experiencing terrorist atrocities from domestic security threats with reported international connections.

The Philippines unequivocally supported America despite severe domestic criticism. The Philippines opened its territorial air space and offered transit points, sent a modest contingent to Iraq, reevaluated its own response to countering terrorism, and intensified operations against domestic threats. U.S.-Philippine relations promise better prospects despite the departure of the last American troops in 1992.

Above all, the GWOT is a continuing campaign that will require a determined effort and full commitment from both the U.S. and the Philippines. The terrorist challenge both countries are facing is definitely linked. Toward this end, U.S.-Philippine security relations stand at the crossroads in realizing the objectives of the war on terror for the mutual benefit of both countries.

### **TERRORISM DEFINED**

Terrorism is in general defined as the actual or threatened use of violence for political goals, directed not only against the victims themselves but also against larger, related groups,

of a scope often transcending national boundaries. The term usually implies action by non-governmental groups, or by irregular or secret units, operating outside the usual parameters of warfare. The object of terrorism is not so much the accomplishment of military goals as the propagation of terror in the target community, which is thereby coerced into acting according to the terrorist's wishes. Extreme terrorism often aims simply at the destabilization of a state by causing maximum chaos, to enable radical transformation.<sup>4</sup> The 9/11 attacks against U.S. were attributed to Al-Qa'ida, a network consisting of several fundamentalist organizations worldwide, then primarily based in Afghanistan, almost halfway around the globe from the United States mainland, and was executed by determined individuals utilizing unparalleled means.

The Philippines has been beset by terrorist attacks in the past. One of the earliest attacks was the hijacking of a Philippine Airlines domestic flight in 1976. The presence of international terrorists was first revealed in 1985 with reports of liaisons between these groups and Muslim secessionist groups in the Southern Philippines. However, the international terrorist groups were never directly involved until 1991, when an Iraqi terrorist organization tried to bomb the U.S. embassy in Manila as retaliation to the U.S.-led Operation Desert Storm in 1990 against Iraq.<sup>5</sup> Since then, the Philippines was subjected to numerous terrorist activities, either from purely domestic terrorist groups or those with foreign connections.

Terrorism is a cause-oriented activity. The four main causes are: ideological, fight for independence, greed or religion, or a combination of causes. Al-Qaida's purpose is to unite all Muslims and to establish a government, which follows the rule of the Caliphs.<sup>6</sup> The Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), as envisioned by a key leader, Hambali, also aims to unite Southeast Asia under an Islamic banner, by means of violent overthrow of the region's existing governments.<sup>7</sup> In the Philippines, both separatist movements, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), also want to establish a pure Islamic state in the country. America is considered as the greatest stumbling block towards this goal, and Muslim extremists and fundamentalists consider America as the "evil empire," with Western values they deeply hate.

The horror and magnitude of the 9/11 attacks illustrate the vital elements that define terrorism. First, it needs an organization that is focused, from top to bottom, on dying for a cause. Second, the attacks involved vast amounts of manpower, logistics and money. Third, given the need for specific requirements, such as fake identities and passports, and bank connections, it is doubtful if such an organization can function without state sponsorship, or at least a state that allows it to use its territory extensively. Lastly, it is amazing that an organization can gather nineteen men who are willing to commit suicide and train for a long time to achieve their goal.<sup>8</sup>

Al Qa'ida is the quintessential terrorist network. It was relentless in its effort to hurt America. The failure of the first bomb attack to bring down the WTC in New York in February 1993 did not cause them to abandon their avowed ambition. Bin Laden has enormous personal wealth with added finances from other dubious sources to support their goals. Afghanistan provided the ideal sanctuary and base of operation where the Al-Qa'ida could plan, control operations and train dedicated individuals over a period of time. Discipline and commitment were exhibited throughout the training and execution of the plan. The above description likewise characterizes the JI, demonstrated by its recent bombings in Bali and Jakarta, Indonesia, and also the ASG by its raid of a coastal town in the Southern Philippines in 1995.

#### **THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM (GWOT)**

America's leadership fully understood the true nature of the tragedy of 9/11. President Bush declared, "The United States of America is fighting a war against terrorists of global reach. The enemy is not a single political regime or person or religion or ideology. The enemy is terrorism---premeditated, politically motivated violence, perpetrated against innocents."<sup>9</sup> The civilized world sympathized with America's predicament. Bound by deep ties and friendship, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo strongly condemned the dastardly acts and offered the use of Philippine air space during Operation Enduring Freedom.

President Bush also swore, "Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil. War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder. The conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing."<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, regime changes were effected in Afghanistan and Iraq. Al-Qa'ida network, which enjoyed unlimited power and privilege during the Taliban regime, was flushed out of its stronghold, and Afghanistan is now on the road towards democracy with a newly drawn constitution. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein, who has always threatened his neighbors, used weapons of mass destruction against his adversaries, and oppressed his own people, was captured, and most of his cronies are dead, captured or surrendered. The Iraqi people are slowly getting a taste of democracy and freedom.

The Philippines likewise intensified its internal security operations with the Al-Qa'ida - linked Abu Sayyaf as the primary target. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), with U.S. support, was able to reduce the ASG to less than half of its year 2000 estimated force as well as neutralizing several of its top-ranking leaders including JI personalities.

Despite the results, these successes seem hollow and there is a need for continued vigilance. Osama Bin Laden and several of his cohorts, and members of the Taliban are still unaccounted for. Coalition forces in Iraq continue to meet armed opposition and suffer casualties. President Bush admitted, "Twenty-eight months have passed since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 – over two years without an attack on American soil. And it is tempting to believe that the danger is behind us. That hope is understandable, comforting – and false. The killing has continued in Bali, Jakarta, Casablanca, Riyadh, Mombasa, Jerusalem, Istanbul and Baghdad. The terrorists continue to plot against America and the civilized world."<sup>11</sup>

The Philippines likewise continued to experience terrorist attacks. The ASG continues to kidnap innocent civilians, extort financial and material support, and bomb public places and public transportation in the Southern Philippines. Terrorists carried out two separate bombings in Davao City's airport and seaport in Mindanao in the early months of 2003, which took 49 lives including an American missionary.

The GWOT is based on the premise that the U.S. cannot prosecute the war alone. The National Security Strategy (NSS) outlines this need, "While our focus is protecting America, we know that to defeat terrorism in today's globalized world we need support from our allies and friends. Wherever possible, the United States will rely on regional organizations and state powers to meet their obligations to fight terrorism."<sup>12</sup> The intent is "to stop terrorist attacks against United States, its citizens, its interests, and our friends and allies around the world and ultimately create an international environment inhospitable to terrorists and all those who support them."<sup>13</sup> The NSS further states, "The United States, with its unique ability to build partnerships and project power, will lead a fight against terrorist organizations of global reach. By adapting old alliances and creating new partnerships, we will facilitate regional solutions that further isolate the spread of terrorism."<sup>14</sup>

There are currently 69 nations supporting the GWOT.<sup>15</sup> In particular, the Philippine government, bound by security arrangements with the U.S., acted resolutely and formulated a determined policy against terrorism, joined the 'coalition of the willing', and spearheaded activities to boost cooperation against terrorism in East and Southeast Asia.

The Philippines, definitely, has a significant role in this respect due to its security agreements with the U.S., its relative location with Muslim countries in Southeast Asia, and the link between the local separatist movements and regional and international terrorist groups. The important role the Philippines can play in the war on terrorism is greatly recognized. Ambassador-at-large for Counter-terrorism, Copper Black, praised President Arroyo's decision to put the regional terror network JI on to top of the "order of battle" and said the Philippines was

a key venue. He went on to say, "We have no partner in the region that has made progress in a shorter period of time than the Philippines."<sup>16</sup>

### **AL-QA'IDA'S LINKAGES TO SOUTHEAST ASIA**

The terrorist threat is a flexible, transnational network, enabled by modern technology and characterized by loose inter-connectivity both within and between groups. In this environment, terrorists work together in funding, sharing intelligence, training, logistics, planning and executing attacks. Terrorist groups with objectives in one country can draw strength and support from groups in other countries or regions.<sup>17</sup> The connections between Al-Qa'ida and terrorist groups throughout Southeast Asia highlight this reality.<sup>18</sup> Al-Qa'ida was attracted to Southeast Asia for three main reasons: the growth of Islamic grievances within Southeast Asian states since the 1970s for socio-economic and political reasons, the Afghan connection to Middle Western extremists, and most importantly, the accessibility of Southeast Asian states as "countries of convenience" for international terrorists.<sup>19</sup>

International terrorism grips the Southeast Asian region with the Al-Qa'ida-linked Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the ASG. Then United States Pacific Command Commander, Admiral Dennis C. Blair, in a testimony to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2002 reported, "The terrorist threat in the Asia-Pacific region consists primarily of local groups with links to Al-Qa'ida that are hostile to the U.S. and our friends. Our understanding of the threat has increased greatly since September 11, as we brought more intelligence resources to bear and shared intelligence with other countries. The JI, which has plotted against U.S. and other nations' citizens, vessels and facilities in Singapore, is one group of concern."<sup>20</sup>

The JI was the culprit in the bombings in Bali, Indonesia that killed 202 people in October 2002, and at the Jakarta hotel in August 2003. In Thailand, JI top leader Hambali, who was captured in August 2003, had planned a foiled attack against October's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Bangkok that had brought together twenty-one leaders including U.S. President Bush.<sup>21</sup> The JI was also involved in the string of Metro Manila bombings in 2002, which one of the key JI operatives, Indonesian Fathur Roman Al Ghozi, admitted after his capture. Meanwhile, the ASG has also extended its atrocities beyond the Philippine territory. The group abducted 23 foreign nationals from France, Germany, Finland, South Africa, Lebanon and Malaysia from the Sipadan Island resort, Malaysia on April 23, 2000.

### **THE AL-QA'IDA-ABU SAYYAF LINKAGE**

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said, "There is no doubt that such links exist. The U.S. has three pieces of "evidence" to back up this stance. First, Abu Sayyaf founder Abdurajak

Janjalani met with Osama Bin Laden's brother-in-law Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, in the early 1990s. Second, the group received training from Ramzi Yousef, convicted of the 1993 World Trade Center attack, who also has been linked to bin Laden. Finally, members of ASG trained in Afghanistan with Al-Qa'ida leaders.<sup>22</sup> Khalifa's network of Islamic charities and a university in Zamboanga was used to bankroll extremist groups. Abu Sayyaf received training and money funneled through Khalifa's network.<sup>23</sup> Further, Philippine immigration records show that many terrorists involved in either the embassy bombings in Nairobi or Dar es Salaam, or in the 9/11 attacks visited the Philippines regularly.<sup>24</sup>

## PHILIPPINE INTERNAL SECURITY CONCERNS

The Philippines confronts three major threat groups: the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). The CPP/NPA threat spans across the whole Philippine archipelago, except in predominantly Muslim areas in Mindanao. The MILF basically operates in Mindanao, the adjacent islands and partly in Palawan Island. The ASG is based in the Basilan and Sulu island provinces.

### COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE PHILIPPINES/NEW PEOPLES ARMY (CPP/NPA)

The CPP/NPA is primary threat to Philippine national security and has been fighting the government for more than three decades.<sup>25</sup> The movement presently has an estimated strength of about 9,000, and had reached a high of 25,000 in 1987 (See Figure 2).<sup>26</sup>

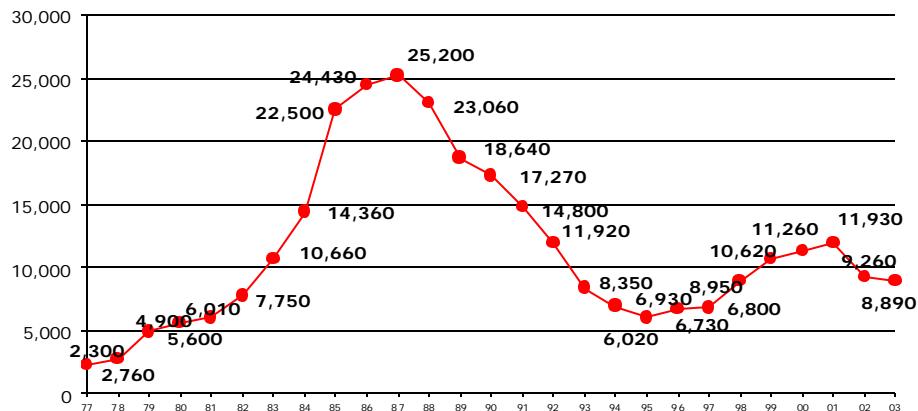


FIGURE 2. ESTIMATED CPP/NPA STRENGTH FROM 1977-2003

#### MORO ISLAMIC LIBERATION FRONT (MILF)

The MILF is the main separatist group in the Southern Philippines, which reached its peak strength of over 15,000 in 1999. After an all-out war by the Philippine government in 2000, its strength started to decline and is presently at about 12,000 (See Figure 3).<sup>27</sup> The MILF denied charges that it supports the Abu Sayyaf or that it is linked to bin Laden's network. Its recent cooperative stature with the government could be seen as an attempt to evade the corrosive terrorist label.<sup>28</sup> The MILF, however, has reported linkages with several international terrorist groups, notably with Al-Qa'ida, for financial support, especially after funding from Libya waned substantially in the mid-1990s.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, nine of the 23 JI members arrested in December 2001 admitted to having trained at MILF camps.<sup>30</sup>

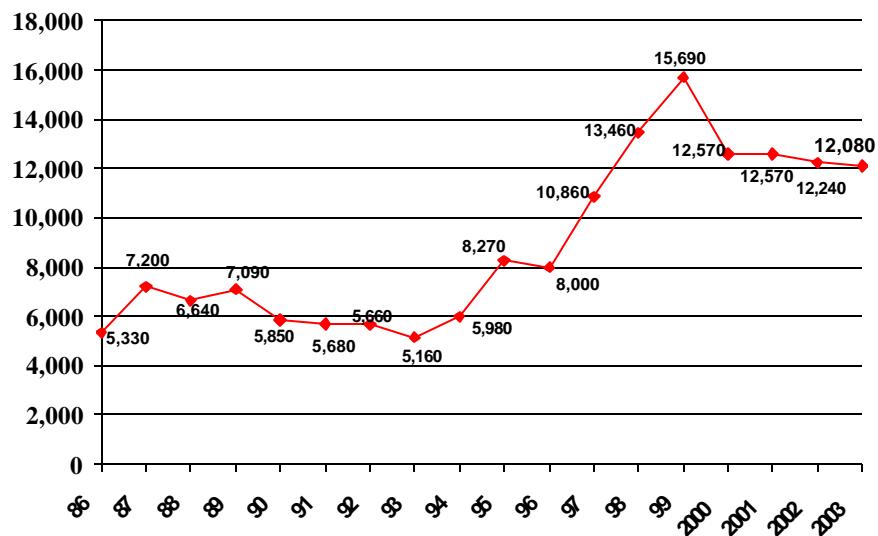


FIGURE 3. ESTIMATED MILF STRENGTH FROM 1986-2003

#### ABU SAYYAF GROUP (ASG)

The ASG is the most radical among the domestic threat groups. In its first large-scale operation, the group stormed the coastal town of Ipi, Zamboanga del Sur in Mindanao in April 1995, killing more than fifty people in the process. It gained worldwide notoriety with the Sipadan Island raid wherein an estimated \$25 million from Libyan leader Moammar Khaddafy was paid for the freedom of several hostages.<sup>31</sup> Encouraged by the Sipadan windfall, the ASG raided the Dos Palmas Resort in Palawan Island on 28 May 2001 and abducted twenty people

including three Americans. Guillermo Sobero of California was later beheaded in June 2001, and though government forces rescued Gracia Burnham of Kansas, her husband Martin was killed during the recovery operation on June 7, 2002. The group used its profits from kidnappings to recruit more members and buy additional armaments. After the sudden influx of Libyan ransom money in 2000, their ranks swelled to approximately 1,200 young men, lured mainly by attractive salary and armaments.<sup>32</sup> Intense military operations starting in 2001 greatly reduced the group to approximately 500 by December 2003 (See Figure 4).<sup>33</sup>

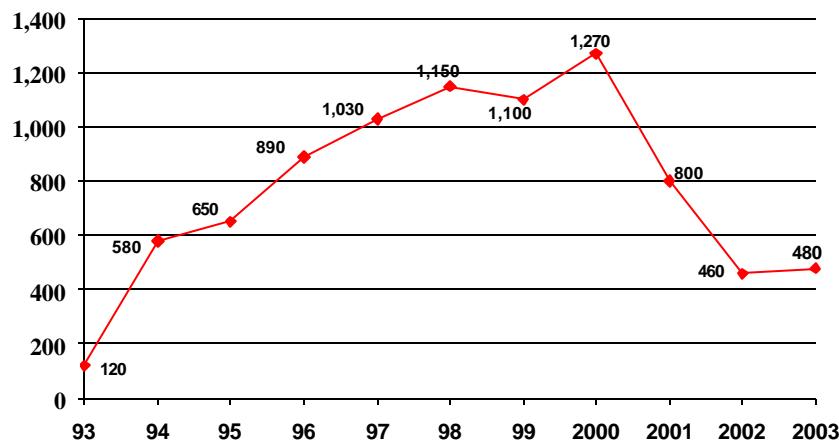


FIGURE 4. ASG ESTIMATED STRENGTH FROM 1993-2003

#### PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Philippine government efforts to address these threats include political, economic, military and informational dimensions. The government was successful in bringing the CPP/NPA to the negotiating table despite being listed as a foreign terrorist organization.<sup>34</sup> The MILF has also agreed to sit down with the Philippine government, wherein the U.S. and Malaysia expressed interest in brokering the peace negotiations.

The Philippine military was somewhat successful in containing the terrorist threats, notwithstanding its limited operational capabilities. The CPP/NPA was decreased to its lowest number in 1995, without significant U.S. military assistance. Until 1992, U.S. military assistance averaged \$200 million annually but fell to zero after the Philippine Senate refused to approve an extension for the lease of military bases<sup>35</sup>. Meanwhile, the main MILF stronghold in Mindanao fell during the “all-out military offensive” conducted by the AFP in 2000, with minimal U.S.

support. Military assistance in the form of Economic Support Funds has increased from zero in FY 2000 to an estimated \$9 million in 2001.<sup>36</sup> The ASG also experienced a sharp decline in strength due to renewed American support.

On the informational side, the battle in hearts and minds of every Filipino, almost single-handedly undertaken by the military through its multi-faceted civil-military operations, largely contributed to the decrease in the enemy forces. The Philippine government, however, still has to address one of the root causes of rebellion---poverty. More families are falling below the poverty line every year, with an estimated 40 percent of Filipinos below the poverty level in 2003, up from 38 percent in 2001.<sup>37</sup>

#### **THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES (AFP)**

The AFP's institutional role in Philippine society is a constitutionally mandated mission, the protector of the people and the State and to secure the sovereignty of the State and the integrity of national territory.<sup>38</sup> The AFP, however, faces immediate operational and organizational problems. The AFP has limited capability to defend its mainland and coastline against all existing and foreseeable threats. The lack of modern (and operational) air and naval forces resulted in an acute inability to monitor the archipelago's vast air and sea spaces.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the 1997 financial crisis was a severe setback for the much-anticipated 15-year Philippine Armed Forces Modernization Program, announced to revive the neglected military. The \$13.2 billion plan was adversely affected due to the near-collapse of the peso, which has drastically reduced the purchasing power of the funds.<sup>40</sup>

#### **U.S.-PHILIPPINE SECURITY RELATIONS**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Philippines was the Pentagon's military stronghold and its economic, political and military linchpin in Southeast Asia,<sup>41</sup> where the country suited and served U.S. interests from the early years of American occupation through the war years. Several security agreements underscored this relationship, although, the 1951 Military Bases Agreement (MBA) proved to be the most controversial, which accounted for U.S. military forward presence in the Asia-Pacific. The present security agreements between the U.S. and the Philippines are the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) of 1951, Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement of 1953, the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) of 1999 and the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) of 2002. The 1951 MDT serves as the mechanism for the two countries, as defense partners, to respond in the event of an armed attack by foreign forces on the metropolitan territories, armed forces, public vessels or aircraft of either country.<sup>42</sup> The objectives of the 1951 MDT will only be achieved if regular exercises are conducted between

Philippine and U.S. armed forces.<sup>43</sup> The 1953 Mutual Defense Assistance (MDAA) revised and extended the 1947 Military Assistance Agreement (MAA), which constituted the continued commitment of the U.S. government to make equipment, materials, devices and other assistance available to the Philippines.<sup>44</sup>

In September 1991, the Philippine Senate rejected the treaty renewal by a one-vote margin, despite being strongly pushed by President Corazon Aquino for its retention.<sup>45</sup> This came at a time of political turmoil in the Philippines, when the nationalist movement to remove the U.S. military bases was at its peak.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, around 80 percent of the people, according to poll surveys at the time, were in favor of the U.S. bases.<sup>47</sup> The American response to Filipinos' reaffirmation of national pride was equally impassioned: the U.S. Congress cut military and economic assistance to the Philippines from \$200 million down to \$40 million in 1993. The Philippines virtually disappeared from the American strategic map.<sup>48</sup>

"The lack of defense cooperation between old allies has created a power vacuum (in Asia) that China has been exploiting, observed Richard Fischer Jr., director of the Heritage Foundation's Asian Studies Center. Fischer argues that U.S. interest---defined in terms how Asian markets would mean (four million) jobs for the Americans---would be served by the reinforcement of military presence in East Asia to counter China, and at the same time preserve key sea lanes in the region."<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, American military posture in the Asia-Pacific signified the region's strategic importance to U.S. interests. Everything seemed to be "rolling back" except in the Asia-Pacific, where the U.S. kept the status quo as far as its Cold War fighting infrastructure was concerned. To some extent, the U.S. forces were even upgraded.<sup>50</sup>

The U.S. has repeatedly stated that it has no interest in reviving its bases in the Philippines, but makes no bones about wanting to have access without bases.<sup>51</sup> The U.S. negotiated with the Philippine government for the signing of the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA) in November 1994, which obligates the Philippines to provide military ships and planes with limited refueling, repair, supply and storage facilities. Due to protests from many Filipinos, the ACSA was not signed.<sup>52</sup> In November 1997, the U.S. again proposed the signing of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that grants rights and privileges to U.S. armed forces visiting the Philippines for war games and training exercises. Like the ACSA, the SOFA was not signed.<sup>53</sup>

On October 6, 1998, the Executive submitted for ratification an agreement signed by both the U.S. and the Philippines, the VFA, to the Philippine Senate. The Philippine Senate ratified the agreement in May 1999 by a vote of 18-5.<sup>54</sup> The approval of the VFA was based on shared interests of regional peace and stability. For the Philippines, this change of heart was likely

prompted by the resurgence of militant Islam, because peace talks with the MILF had stalled, and the Abu Sayyaf had become bolder.<sup>55</sup> The end of military rule in Indonesia, which shares an extremely porous maritime border with the Philippines, also presented another possible source of militant Islamic activity. Compared to issues of economic cooperation, terrorism was tangible and demanding critical attention.<sup>56</sup>

The VFA regulates the circumstances and conditions under which U.S. forces may visit the Philippines for bilateral military exercises.<sup>57</sup> The signing of the VFA signaled the resumption of various military exercises that cover joint/combined land, air, naval, marine and special operations components. The “*Balikatan*” (shoulder-to-shoulder) series, an annual, large-scale, combined/joint exercise designed to improve planning, readiness and inter-operability conducted between USPACOM and AFP elements, resumed in 2000. The 9/11 attacks, however, constrained the exercise planners to propose a counter-insurgency, counter-terrorist-oriented “*Balikatan*” exercise in 2002. Codenamed RP-U.S. Exercise “*Balikatan*” 02-1, it was conducted right on the terrorists’ doorstep, in Basilan Island and Zamboanga City.

American interest in the Philippine counter-terrorism efforts, however, was generated by the kidnappings of four American citizens by Abu Sayyaf elements in separate incidents in Zamboanga City and Palawan Island. Jeffrey Schilling of California was kidnapped on 28 August 2000, while Sobero and the Burnhams were abducted in May 2001. These incidents gave way for increased assistance from Washington, which was welcomed by the Philippine government and was used to boost its counter-terrorism efforts. American forces’ participation in AFP rescue operations was also offered. Kansas Congressman Todd Tiahrt in December 2000 said, “The whole purpose of this trip is to try to get our troops involved in the rescue. We have highly trained, highly skilled professionals at hostage rescue.”<sup>58</sup> The Philippine government however disagreed to the proposal because of domestic political pressure and constitutional backlash.

The MLSA, a facilitation agreement for reciprocal provision of logistics between the AFP and U.S. forces, was approved in November 2002 especially for the limited basing of U.S. forces’ equipment in the Philippines. Primarily, its purpose is to lower the cost of security cooperation by minimizing administrative costs and waste. The MLSA can come to play only in conjunction with an approved activity under the MDT or the VFA.<sup>59</sup>

#### **U.S.-PHILIPPINE RESPONSES IN COMBATING TERRORISM**

The challenge of 9/11 has brought the U.S. to a greater realization that alliances and partnership with other nations are imperative to its survival and enjoyment of its own values and

way of life, despite its economic and military might. More than sympathy, it needs commitment, cooperation and courage from allies regardless of domestic or international implications. The Philippines fully understands this predicament. The Philippines' external defense is primarily anchored on its mutual defense alliance with the United States. More over, the peaceful resolution of Philippine insurgencies that besieged and hindered the country's progress and development for almost three decades requires consideration and support from other nations and organizations as well.

The Philippines provided a very strong response to Washington's appeals for assistance in the war on terrorism. President Arroyo quickly announced a "14 Pillar of Policy and Action" to combat terrorism and that her administration would go "all out" to assist the United States and implement U.N. Security Council Resolution 1368. The "14 Pillars" included offering Philippine airspace and seaports to U.S. forces, and intelligence and logistical support.<sup>60</sup> The Philippines also provided a humanitarian contingent of 96 non-combatants to Iraq, and advocated anti-terrorism cooperation in Southeast Asia. The Philippines has signed an anti-terrorism pact with Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Thailand.<sup>61</sup> It also hosted the second meeting of the Forum for East Asian-Latin American Cooperation (FEALAC) in January 2004 among thirty-two countries, which agreed make security issues ranging from terrorism to transnational crime a top priority.<sup>62</sup>

America's desire to intensify efforts against the ASG was also heeded to by the Philippine government. The conduct of another "*Balikatan*" exercise in the Southern Philippines, other than the regular exercise, was recommended and approved. A Terms of Reference (TOR) was created to allay fears of U.S. forces' participation in AFP counter-terrorist operations. From January to July 2002, the U.S. put 1,100 troops on the ground in the Philippines to train Philippine soldiers in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism against the ASG.<sup>63</sup> The exercise proved to be very successful and rewarding for both sides. The ASG was on the run and the American troops were positively received in the area. The Philippine Daily Inquirer reported, "Although militant groups assailed the presence of U.S. troops in Mindanao, most residents of Zamboanga City and Basilan welcome it."<sup>64</sup>

The same type of exercise was slated again in 2003, but was stalled. When a second *Balikatan* exercise was announced in February 2003, Pentagon officials described the mission not as a training exercise but as a combat operation.<sup>65</sup> This disclosure created much controversy and public outcry that forced the Philippine government to change its tune, reassuring the people that American troops will not participate in combat operations. While a

new TOR was still being drawn up for 2004, the regular *Balikatan* exercise continued and was held February 23 to March 7 in Central Luzon and Palawan.

The GWOT provided a welcomed opportunity for the Philippine government. The war on terror gave the Arroyo Administration both the domestic and foreign support it needed to confront the ongoing Muslim insurgency in the south. Arroyo's ultimate goal is to defeat Muslim separatists there and to sign a durable autonomy agreement with groups that seek a political solution. She was greatly rewarded by the United States for her cooperation. In November 2001, Washington unveiled an aid program worth more than \$1 billion.<sup>66</sup> In terms of military assistance, the U.S. is spending a total of almost \$115 million on the Philippines in the next three fiscal years, the fourth highest in the world. The cost of international military exercise and training in the country alone is the highest in Asia and second highest in the world.<sup>67</sup> The Bush Administration had asked the Congress for a significantly higher budget of \$164 million for military and economic assistance in fiscal 2005 for the Philippines.<sup>68</sup>

Other than the financial windfall and military assistance, the Philippines was designated as a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally of the U.S. in October 2003, and will join Australia and other countries (Japan, Israel, Egypt, South Korea and Argentina) to get the first crack at U.S. military equipment and grant benefits in foreign aid and defense security cooperation.<sup>69</sup> President Bush also announced that the U.S. would play a role in peace talks between the (Philippine) government and the MILF as long as the group abandons the "path of violence".<sup>70</sup> In this light, the government has convinced Washington to not designate the MILF a FTO and has downplayed the links between the MILF and Al-Qa'ida.<sup>71</sup>

## **ANALYSIS**

The GWOT has revived U.S.-Philippine security relations, which reached its lowest point with the abrogation of the MBA in 1991. Early U.S. efforts to renew security ties and military engagements with the Philippines were premised on regional peace and stability, while the Philippines saw them as an opportunity to enhance its capability to address domestic security threats. Although the U.S. showed interest with the abduction of U.S. citizens by the ASG in the early 2000s, it was only in the aftermath of 9/11 that the U.S. exhibited serious concern about Philippine internal security operations.

The Philippines is a strategic player in the GWOT. Foremost, aside from sharing the same Western values of democracy and freedom, the Philippines has standing security arrangements with the U.S. that will provide a basis for mutual support between the two countries in pursuing the war on terror. Second, the connection between Al-Qa'ida, the JI and

the homegrown Philippine secessionist movements is a mutual concern for the U.S. and Philippine governments. As pointed out, terrorist groups draw strength and support from each other in the pursuit of their respective objectives. In the case of the Philippines, Al-Qa'ida provides the finances and training expertise, the JI also provides expert training while the ASG and the MILF provide training venues and sanctuaries. Finally, Philippine efforts to create a common front against terrorism in the Asia-Pacific region will be received positively by predominantly Muslim Malaysia and Indonesia and will not be viewed as an American initiative although it will simultaneously promote the objectives of GWOT. Philippine initiatives will be viewed as its own desire to address its internal security concerns.

The Philippine's strong expression of support to America's cause further strengthened the warming relations between the two countries. Former Philippine Foreign Secretary Roberto Romulo underscored what he called the "benefits" of reviving Philippine-American ties when he quipped, "Now we are back on the radar screen."<sup>72</sup> The financial and security benefits mentioned above will surely provide the Philippines the much needed resources and support. Those benefits will enhance the government's internal security campaign that would help bring to an end the Philippine internal conflicts, and help propel the country toward stability and development. None of this comes without a price however. The Philippine government has to weather the storms of domestic political protests over its membership in the "coalition of the willing." The conduct of counter-insurgency focused "*Balikatan*" exercises which draw U.S. forces into terrorist-infested areas bring its own unique challenges to the political forefront. Philippine nationalists warn against American intentions to acquire permanent basing as well as a possible weakening of democratic institutions and process in the country,<sup>73</sup> while others warn of heightened terrorist attacks that would have profound political and economic repercussions.

#### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

President Bush best described the principle behind U.S.-Philippine relations during the state visit of President Arroyo in May 2003, "Our two nations share special ties of history and friendship and family. And we share a commitment to the defense of democracy and the advance of freedom."<sup>74</sup> This shared commitment to democracy and freedom has survived the test of time. Presently, the war on terrorism is the crucible of that shared commitment of preserving life, liberty and democracy.

In the light of the terrorist challenge, the U.S. and the Philippines have also found congruent security interests, in the linkages between the Philippine secessionist movements, Al-Qa'ida and JI. A determined campaign against Philippine insurgent movements bodes well for

Philippine internal security and development, while the need to isolate and make the environment hostile for terrorists, as enunciated in the NSS, will gain ground.

The cornerstone of Philippine commitment in the GWOT is its present security arrangements with the United States. U.S.-Philippine security relations are the means by which mutual support would be extended in realizing the objectives of the GWOT- to protect America and its allies, to defeat terrorism. The following policy options for the U.S. are recommended:

First, the U.S. must help improve the operational capabilities of the Philippine military. The AFP has manifested its capability to address its own internal security concerns despite confronting the complex nature of the threats, attending to non-traditional roles and fulfilling its regional and international commitments. The focus should be on modernizing the AFP to improve its command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance reconnaissance, and (C4ISR) capability. The Philippine military has demonstrated greater efficiency and effectiveness with technical support from U.S. forces in its recent campaign against the ASG.

Second, the presence of U.S. forces must be confined to training exercises alone, which will also enhance the operational effectiveness of the AFP. Conflicting signals between Washington and Manila, as to the participation of U.S. forces in combat operations, will only strain the newfound rapprochement between the U.S. and the Philippines. The static nature of U.S. forces, which runs counter to its pre-emptive strike policy, must be subordinated to Philippine sovereignty concerns. The Philippine Constitution provides that the AFP has the responsibility to defend the country and its people.

Third, Washington must support the peace initiatives of the Philippine government with regards to the CPP/NPA and the MILF due to its unprecedented influence in the global political arena, which both movements recognize. The resolution of these problems will ultimately focus Philippine military resources in addressing the ASG whose links with Al-Qa'ida and JI is the primary concern of the United States in the GWOT.

Fourth, the U.S. must support the political and economic development of the Philippines. The U.S. needs to understand the perception of the Filipino people regarding its policies on the Philippines. The U.S. is perceived to have politically and economically exploited the Philippines for its own self-interest, and it is oftentimes blamed for the current political turmoil and economic predicament the country is facing. The road to stability and prosperity will help wash away the root causes of dissent and disaffection that has plagued the Philippines for years. America must not focus solely on providing economic dole outs, which are palliative in nature. Rather,

the U.S. must encourage direct investment and support Philippine initiatives toward competitiveness in the global market particularly with agricultural products.

Finally, U.S. support must be based on mutual respect, commitment and understanding, where the future and the health of these security relations truly reside. The reality of a powerful nation and a weak country must be set aside, so bilateral cooperation can emphasize common interests rather than differences. The GWOT has created a successful strategic partnership that can serve as a framework for broader security cooperation for the mutual benefit of U.S. and the Philippines.

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<sup>8</sup> Barreveld, ix, 18-19, 28. Barreveld illustrates the vital elements that define terrorism.

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<sup>30</sup> Huang, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Clark, 2.

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